



# Rāhui

by Steph Matuku

Huia went into the garden and checked the strawberries. There were thirty little berries, slowly growing ripe and red. The berries had started off small and hard – white with green dots. Under the hot summer sun, they were slowly turning pink and growing plump. Huia checked them every day. She couldn't wait until they were bright red and ready for eating.

“It will be worth the wait,” said Mum. “When they're fully ripe, we can have them with ice cream for my birthday hākari.”

But one morning, Huia carefully pulled back the leaves and counted the strawberries – twenty-nine. She counted again. Nope. Still twenty-nine.

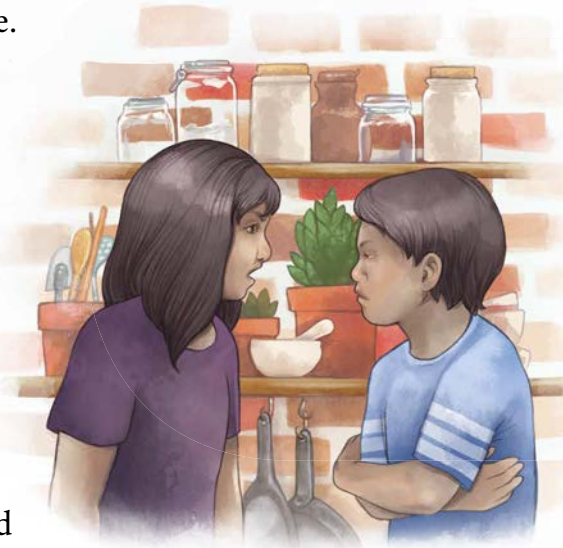
“Did you eat one of the strawberries?” she asked her brother, Tama. “They're supposed to be for Mum's birthday!”

“No!” said Tama, but Huia thought she saw a hint of sticky red juice on his chin.

The next day, Huia counted the strawberries again. Twenty-eight!

“What?” she cried and counted again. But she'd counted wrong – there were actually only twenty-seven!

A sparrow was sitting on the fence. “Did you eat the strawberries, manu?” asked Huia. But the sparrow just chirped and flew off into the bushes.



The next day, Huia was almost too scared to count the strawberries, and when she finally did ... oh no – twenty-six!

“Was it you?” she growled at the kiore, who lived behind the compost bin. The kiore just stared at her and then ran into its hole.



“Was it you?” she asked Dad. Her dad shook his head. “Of course not. Those strawberries are for your mother’s birthday.”

Huia frowned. “Well, someone’s taking them,” she said.

“Never mind,” said Mum. “Twenty-six strawberries is still pretty good. There’ll be enough for everyone.”

“Not if someone keeps eating them!” said Huia. “I think we need a rāhui on the strawberries.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” said Mum. “Do you think everyone will listen?”



“I’ll explain it to them,” Huia said, and she called a hui. Dad was there and Mum and Tama. The sparrow perched on the fence as if it were listening, too. And Huia could see the kiore hiding in the compost bin.



“The strawberries are being eaten,” Huia announced. “If we eat them all, there won’t be any left for Mum’s birthday next week. So we need to agree not to eat any more.”

“But that’s what strawberries are for,” said Tama. “They’re to eat. They’re not just to look at.”

Huia looked at him sternly. “We’ll eat them soon,” she said, “but not right now. If we leave them alone now, they’ll be even more delicious by Mum’s birthday. They’ll be ripe and red and perfect to eat. So, do you agree?”

Huia stared at Dad, and Dad turned to Mum, and Mum looked at Tama, who looked a bit cross. Then everyone nodded in agreement. Even the sparrow on the fence seemed to nod its head.

The next day, Huia went down to the garden to count the strawberries. One was missing.

“What?” cried Huia. “What about the rāhui? Everyone agreed!” Then she caught sight of a little bit of red under a leaf. “Oh,” she said. “There it is. Number twenty-six. Found you.”



The next day, there were still twenty-six strawberries. And the next day, and the next. And then, finally, it was Mum’s birthday hākari.

“Time to lift the rāhui!” said Huia.

“Time for strawberries and ice cream!” said Mum.

“And about time, too,” said Tama.



Dad shared out the strawberries. “That’s six each,” he said, “and two left over.”

“Who’s going to have those?” asked Tama.

“I know who can have them,” said Huia.

She took the last two strawberries and went outside. The sparrow was perched on the roof, and she could see the kiore’s whiskers poking out of his hole.

“You kept the rāhui,” she said, “so you should have strawberries, too.”

She put one strawberry on the fence and the other on the compost bin.

“Enjoy!” she said.



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